

Washington, DC – U.S. Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23) met with Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki Wednesday morning to discuss progress and challenges regarding veterans' issues, including access to healthcare, job creation and specialized training for returning service members.

"Secretary Shinseki is providing strong leadership at the Department of Veterans Affairs and I value our meetings as a way to exchange information and perspective," said Congressman Rodriguez. "As a member of the Veterans Affairs and Appropriations Committees who also represents a large veterans' constituency, I want to continue communicating my concerns to the Secretary and finding out how the VA can assist veterans and family members in my district."

Rodriguez briefed Secretary Shinseki on updates in the 23rd Congressional District, including three new veterans' clinics recently opened in Del Rio, Uvalde and South Bexar County. He added that access to healthcare for veterans continues to be challenging in far West Texas, where often the nearest facility is hours away. Congressman Rodriguez also asked Secretary Shinseki for continued support in moving forward with the South Texas Polytrauma Center in San Antonio – the 5th such Tier 1 center in the nation.

Secretary Shinseki said that the VA has been able to make progress on several fronts, thanks to productive Congressional action, such as the advanced appropriations bill that allocates the VA's budget on a two-year cycle, rather than annually. He added that the Obama Administration's commitment to record levels of funding have furthered the VA's mission of providing greater services to veterans.

Both agreed that the new GI Bill is a tremendous opportunity for veterans to get an education. In addition, Congressman Rodriguez is seeking ways in which returning service members can also access immersion training in specialized trades, such as welding or plumbing, that can help them transition back into the workforce.

Congressman Rodriguez also raised the issue of old and outdated veterans' healthcare facilities that could benefit from maintenance and renovation.

"This is a good opportunity to both upgrade much-needed facilities for our veterans and also

contribute to job creation, as workers will be needed to make those repairs and upgrades," Rodriguez said.

Shinseki said veterans' services are needed long after wars end, noting that the VA continues to provide services to descendants of Spanish-American War and Civil War veterans.

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